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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000266

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, DEFENSE FOR OUSDP (DMELLEBY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/06/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [AJ](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: PRESIDENT ALIYEV ON AFGHANISTAN "ASKS"

REF: A. STATE 31102

[1](#)B. BAKU 158

[1](#)C. 08 BAKU 997

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE DERSE, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Ambassador Derse and DAS Matt Bryza raised reftel points with President Aliyev, FonMin Mammadyarov and Deputy FonMin (handling national security issues) Araz Azimov on April 3.

Additional Troop Contributions

[1](#)2. (C) Underscoring that &we are committed to our efforts in Afghanistan,⁸ Aliyev agreed in principle to rotate Azerbaijani battalions into Afghanistan as we train and equip them. FonMin Mammadyarov specified that Azerbaijan would prefer its troops to operate jointly with U.S. forces, as they had done so successfully at Haditha Dam in Iraq, rather than with Turkish forces, as is currently the case in Afghanistan. He also noted that the Afghans had told the GOAJ that they prefer Azerbaijani troops to remain in Kabul, as they generally prefer to have troops from Muslim countries in the capital. Azerbaijan would like its troops to remain in Kabul. Finally, he said, Azerbaijani troops will engage in peacekeeping operations, but not combat operations. President Aliyev agreed and said the USG should follow up with the Defense and Foreign Ministers. Defense Minister Abiyev later also expressed interest to Bryza. Mammadyarov and Azimov said it would be useful if the USG could send someone to Baku who can discuss the details of the arrangement.

Police Training

[1](#)3. (C) The Azerbaijanis also agreed that they could help with police training, noting that they had already offered to the Afghans to train their police in Azerbaijan,s Police Academy, and their diplomats at Azerbaijan,s Diplomatic Academy (during a high level visit to Afghanistan last September, and a subsequent return visit of the Afghan FonMin this winter). They have not yet received a response from the Afghan government.

Expanded Use of Heydar Aliyev IAP

14. (C) With respect to exploring the possibility of expanding existing cooperation at Azerbaijan,s Heydar Aliyev International Airport, Aliyev expressed interest in talking more, saying that whether the GOAJ could agree to do more at Heydar Aliyev would depend on precisely what it is we want to do. Steps suggesting we are setting up a &base8 could be disruptive to relations with neighboring Russian and Iran. Bryza asked whether Aliyev might consider basing a small number of refueling tankers and personnel in what we would define as an augmentation of our existing gas-and-go operation, rather than as a &base.8 Aliyev noted that this would require a political decision, and the GOAJ would want to see what it would get from the arrangement) what advantages/benefits would accrue to Azerbaijan and would they outweigh negative reaction from the neighbors? If Azerbaijan sees more advantages than negatives, the GOAJ could consider it, he said. (Aliyev has already told us that more gas and go would not be a problem, within capacity constraints) reftel B).

COMMENT and ACTION REQUEST:

15. (C) The positive reaction with respect to our request for an additional battalion for Afghanistan is welcome, and follows up on discussions over the past year. We request Washington,s guidance on when an expert could visit Baku to

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discuss details.

16. (C) Aliyev,s response with respect to possibly expanding cooperation at Heydar Aliyev airport is consistent with his frequently expressed wish, over the past two years, for enhanced bilateral security cooperation which offers benefits to both sides. Last fall, Principals approved launching a high level security dialogue (HLSD) with Azerbaijan to explore enhanced security cooperation (reftels B, C). Increased Azerbaijani cooperation in support of operations in Afghanistan would be a good topic for a HLSD. We appreciate Washington guidance on next steps.

DERSE